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## LBI funding heads to House vote

By MIKE JACCARINO Staff Writer, (609) 978-2010

The start of the LBI Project cleared a key legislative hurdle Wednesday, when the U.S. House of Representatives' Appropriations Committee included \$5 million in its draft of the 2006 federal budget.

The LBI Project is a long-term plan to replenish and maintain the island's shoreline. Long Beach Island's beaches have repeatedly suffered erosion-related damage in recent years.

The House committee included \$5 million in its budget draft, according to federal officials. The measure must still be approved on the House floor, as well as the Senate, and ultimately signed by President Bush into law.

However, a spokesperson for U.S. Rep Jim Saxton, R-3rd, said the U.S. House Appropriations Committee is the difficult part, and success there usually indicates ultimate victory.

"The worst thing that could happen is if the Senate has zero in their (version of the) budget," said Jeff Sagnip Hollendonner, a Saxton spokesman. "Then we go to negotiations" between the House and Senate, he said.

The House included \$1 million for LBI Project funding in the 2005 budget. The Senate did not make provisions for the project in its version of the budget. A compromise was reached at \$750,000.

In the 2004 budget, the House included \$1 million in its version of the budget for the LBI Project, the Senate, zero, Hollendonner said. The final U.S. budget included the full \$1 million amount.

The money represents a major step forward for the project. To date, the federal government has appropriated \$1.75 million for the LBI Project.

The money has gone unspent, as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimated that it needs \$15 million to get to work.

The state of New Jersey has pledged \$2 million to \$3 million in matching funds. If \$5 million is included in the 2006 U.S. budget, that would bring the total amount available to \$8.75 million or \$9.75 million.

Hollendonner said that might be enough to get the project started next year.

"The guy is a first-class legislator with everything he's done for coastal

communities No doubt about it. He's an ace," said Beach Haven Mayor Deborah Whitcraft of Saxton. "I just hope that the money will be spent on beaches accessible to the public."

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